

THE LIGHTFOOT FAMILY IN YORKTOWN

A branch of the original Lightfoot family in Virginia lived in Yorktown throughout most of the eighteenth century, and occupied a prominent position in the life, wealth, and activities of the town. Philip Lightfoot (1689-1748) moved to Yorktown about 1707 and his widow, Mary, died there in 1775. For those almost 70 years, the name Lightfoot was usually mentioned along with the name Nelson as being one of the "first families of Yorktown." The Lightfoot mansion, overlooking the harbor of Yorktown, must have presented an imposing picture to a ship sailing up the York River from the Bay.

Progenitors of the Yorktown Lightfoots:

It appears that two Lightfoot brothers, John and Philip, came from England to Gloucester County, Virginia, sometime during the second half of the seventeenth century. In 1670 John received the King's grant as Auditor-General of Virginia, but this grant was suspended the next year.¹ The brothers were the sons of John Lightfoot, a barrister at law in Northamptonshire, England.²

Not much is known about the elder Philip Lightfoot, who was the father of the Philip Lightfoot of Yorktown, but there is enough to identify him as active in local colonial affairs. In 1671 he was a resident of Gloucester County, later serving as lieutenant-colonel of the county militia and as justice of the peace. In 1676 he was a Surveyor-General. Apparently Lightfoot either moved from the York River to the James River, or maintained more than one residence, for he became justice of James City, and collector for the Upper District of the James River. Official reports mention that during Nathaniel Bacon's rebellion in 1676, "Mr. Philip Lightfoot was a great Looser and sufferer both in Estate and person being both Plundered and Imprisoned by the Rebels."³

1. "Lightfoot Family," William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, II (January, 1894), 204.

2. On Philip Lightfoot's tomb at "Sandy Point" in Charles City County, it states that he was the son of John Lightfoot, "Barrister at Law Minister at Stoke Bruin." As a listing of Northamptonshire ministers gives only a Richard Lightfoot, it is felt that John was only a Barrister. (William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, II (October, 1893), 92-93.)

3. Ibid., III (October, 1894), 104-105 and "Persons who Suffered by Bacon's Rebellion. The Commissioner's Report," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, V (1893), 67.

Gift 11/81 (Hansford)

Philip Lightfoot married Alice Corbin, the daughter of Henry Corbin of "Buckingham House" in Middlesex County. Both of their tombs at "Sandy Point" bear the Lightfoot arms (a griffin's head) impaling the Corbin arms. Philip Lightfoot's will, dated 1708, left three tracts of land at "Sandy Point" (then in Wallingford parish, James City County, but after 1720 in Westover parish) to his son Francis. The will stipulated that if Francis died without children, the land would go to his brother, Philip (the Yorktown Lightfoot). Francis had two children, a son who died in childhood, and a daughter, Elizabeth, who married Beverly Randolph. According to her grandfather's will, the "Sandy Point" land would be hers. However, her father left it to Philip, who paid Elizabeth £2,500 for compensation. This was later officially settled by an act of the legislature in 1740, and Philip became legal owner of the land.⁴

The Lightfoots in Yorktown:

The younger Philip Lightfoot established the family name and its social and economic standing in Yorktown. He was born in 1689, and died May 30, 1748. In 1707 he was appointed clerk of York County and shortly thereafter moved to the town. Lightfoot bought one of the only two town lots sold in 1709, Thomas Nelson buying the other. Both lots had been taken up under the Port Act of 1706 and deserted. Lightfoot purchased Lot 38 from the town trustees for 180 pounds of tobacco, with the stipulation that within 12 months he build and furnish "one good house to contain at least Twenty foot wherein if he fail then this present grant to be void."⁵ Apparently Lightfoot built a house on the lot, for he kept title to the land.

Between 1709 and 1742, Lightfoot bought many lots in Yorktown and much plantation land in various Virginia counties. In 1715, he purchased Lot 16, and the houses, other buildings, and gardens on it, from Matthew Ballard for £30 of Virginia money. On this lot he built one of two town houses, probably shortly after he purchased it. This was later improved by the acquisition of the two adjoining lots (Lot 11 in 1733 and Lot 17 in 1732) for gardens and outhouses.⁶

4. "Lightfoot Family," William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, III (October, 1894), 104-105 and William Waller Hening, Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia From the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, (Richmond, Franklin Press, 1819) V, 112-114.

5. Edward M. Riley, The History of the Founding and Development of Yorktown, Virginia, 1691-1781 (a typed manuscript in the library of Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, Virginia), p. 75: York County Records, Deeds and Bonds, No. 2 (1701-1713), pp. 334-335.

6. York County Records, Deeds and Bonds, No. 3 (1713-1729), pp. 81-83: Riley, History of Yorktown, p. 77: York County Records, Deeds and Bonds, No. 4 (1729-1740), pp. 121, 130.

Lightfoot purchased Lot 36 (on which the restored Somerwell House now stands) from Joseph Mountford in 1716 for £80. It is not known how Lightfoot used this property. Lot 7 and Lot 37 were purchased in 1718, Lot 7 from the town trustees for 180 pounds of tobacco and Lot 37 from Edward Powers, an innkeeper, for 5 shillings of English currency. Not only did he buy land in town, but also in nearby counties. In 1717 he acquired the Washington lease on the upper side of Martins Creek in York County. In 1723 land in James City County was purchased from David Morce.⁷ At the time of his death in 1748, Philip Lightfoot owned not only the lots in Yorktown, but property in Williamsburg, and in the following counties: York, Charles City, Surry, Brunswick, New Kent, Hanover, Prince George, and Goochland.⁸

Lightfoot's second town house, and probably the one occupied by the family, was built after he purchased Lot 22 from Warren Cary for £150 of English currency in 1724. It was a large brick mansion on a high bluff overlooking the harbor of Yorktown. The house was bounded on its river side, after 1732, by the defending water battery, and on the other side by the county courthouse. Later Lightfoot purchased adjoining lots for gardens and other purposes. He owned enough land in the immediate area that his house and grounds could be considered ostentatious and befitting a wealthy merchant and planter.⁹ No doubt this house was one of the most elegant in Yorktown. In a description of the town by a traveller in 1736, we read these words:

You perceive a great Air of Opulence among the Inhabitants, who have some of them built themselves Houses, equal in Magnificence to many of our superb ones at St. James's as those of Mr. Lightfoot, Nelson, &c. Almost every considerable Man Keeps an Equipage ... The most considerable Houses are of Brick; some handsome ones of Wood, all built in the modern Taste ...¹⁰

Lightfoot also had use of an area in the town "Commons" of Yorktown, the area along the waterfront below the cliffs. A number of abutting owners, and others, used this area, by one arrangement of the other, for wharves, warehouses, shops, storehouses and related purposes. Very probably he used all, or part, of the ground here fronting on Lots 22, 28, and, possibly

7. York County Records, Deeds and Bonds, No. 3 (1713-1720), pp. 130-131, 255, 273, 325.

8. York County Records, Wills and Inventories, No. 20 (1746-1750), pp. 1-3-106.

9. York County Records, Deeds and Bonds, No. 3 (1713-1723), p. 438 and Riley, p. 78.

10. "Observations in Several Voyages and Travels in America in the year 1736," William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, XV (April, 1907), 222.

16. This seemingly was the location of "Col. Lightfoot's Landing" of mention in 1735.¹¹

Philip Lightfoot was a leading citizen of the Colony. Besides serving as clerk of York County for 26 years (1707-1733), in 1715 he was agent for the public store-house at Yorktown. His tenure as county clerk ended only when he was appointed to the Council of Colonial Virginia, in 1733. He served on the Council until 1747, the year before his death.¹²

In 1720 Lightfoot was called before the Virginia House of Burgesses for "Insulting their Speaker at the door ... in a haughty manner--uttering indecent and reproachfull Language to him and this without any Previous discourse with him." The Speaker at the time was John holloway, a Burgess from York County, Lightfoot had to beg the Speaker's pardon and pay a fine.¹³

Apparently Lightfoot and Nelson controlled a large part of the commercial interests of Yorktown. In 1739 Richard Chapman wrote to Edward Athawes:

Since my being in Virginia Col. Lightfoot was Clerk of York Court and one of our most Considerable Merchants at one and the same time, and every man, who has sense enough to judge right, is convinced that near to that Gentlemans' own Genius, and the Friends which that merited and procured him on your side of the water, the Business of the Office concurred to the Increase and Establishment of the other; of which he was so sensible, that he would never give it up till the King, by his Letter, called him up to the Council.¹⁴

Francis Jerdone, who came to Virginia in 1746 as part owner of a cargo of goods, and as the representative of some London merchants, wrote home that

11. Charles B. Hatch Jr., An Historical Report on "Archer Cottage" and the Yorktown Waterfront, (a mimeographed report in the Library of Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, Virginia, December 15, 1957), p. 70.

12. "Lightfoot Family," William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, III (October, 1894), 105-108 and Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia, edited by E. R. McIlwaine and Wilmer L. Hall (Richmond: Virginia State Library), IV (1930), 307 and V (1945), 239.

13. Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, edited by E. R. McIlwaine (Richmond: Virginia State Library), V, (1912), 286-287.

14. "Letters from the Letter Book of Richard Chapman," William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, XXI (October, 1912), 91-92.

both Lightfoot and Nelson preferred Bristol and Liverpool to London for many staple articles. His advice to the London merchants after Lightfoot's death was indicative of Lightfoot's proficiency in commercial matters;

Col. Philip Lightfoot is now dead, so that you can never have so fair a way open'd to you for establishing a store, as at this present time; his great riches while he continued in health deterred everybody from settling here, none being of ability to vie with him but Mr. Nelson, who always had an equal share of trade with him....¹⁵

Philip Lightfoot's Family

Sometime after 1718 Philip Lightfoot married Mary Armistead, the daughter of William Armistead (1671-1711) of Eastmost River in Matthews County and Anna Lee (daughter of Hancock and Mary Lee) of Northampton County. Mary was one of seven children. She first married James Burwell of King's Creek, who died in 1718.¹⁶ Philip and Mary Lightfoot had four children:

- (1) William, who married Mildred Howell. He lived in Charles City County at Tedington.
- (2) Philip, who married Susannah, _____. Philip died before his father, and as his son, Francis, was not mentioned in Mary Lightfoot's will, he no doubt died before 1773.
- (3) John, who died before 1769, with no children.
- (4) Armistead, who died at his home in Yorktown in 1771, with a personal estate valued at £1340,18.6. He married Anne, daughter of Lewis Burwell. Armistead and Ann had one daughter, Mary, who married John Tayloe Griffin. In 1774, Armistead's widow, Anne, married Charles Grymes of Gloucester.

All four Lightfoot children died before their mother, Mary, who died in 1775.¹⁷

Disposition of the Lightfoot Estate

Philip Lightfoot died in 1748, leaving a rather large estate.¹⁸ In his will of 1747, he names John Grymes, Thomas Lee, William Nelson, Anthony

15. "Letter Book of Francis Jerdone," William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, XI (January, 1903), 154-155.

16. William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, XXV (October, 1916), 118.

17. "Lightfoot Family," William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, III (October, 1894), 105-108.

18. Inscription on his tomb is appended.

Walke, and William Lightfoot as executors. The extent of Lightfoot's wealth can be seen in the manner in which he so adequately provided for his widow, his three remaining sons, and his philanthropic interests.¹⁹

To his widow, Mary Lightfoot, he left their dwelling house and the 3-1/3 adjoining lots (Lots 22, 23, 28, and 1/3 of 29), the use of the household slaves and coachmen, the household and kitchen furnishings, the coach and horses as well as the use of the stock, fire wood, and pasturage. He also bequeathed her the slaves of the King's Creek plantation, the wine and liquor in the town houses and £400 sterling and £400 current money to be paid to her each year for the remainder of her life. He asked that "my friends, Thomas Nelson and Thomas Lee," be appointed to see that these provisions were carried out.

A sizable amount of Lightfoot's fortune was left to each of his three sons, with the added provisions that they would each receive one-third of their mother's estate when she died. William received the lot and buildings he occupied in Yorktown (probably Lots 16, 17, and 11) with the money and household goods he possessed. Also he was willed four lots on the edge of town (in the Union Reade development), the storehouse and lot which had been Joseph Mountfort's (possibly Lot 36), the warehouse under the bank with the mill and land adjoining, most of the land and rental property and some of the stock and household goods in Charles City and Surry counties as well as £200 for repair of the Sandy Point House.

To John, Lightfoot left land and 60 slaves in Brunswick County, the lots, houses and furnishings in Williamsburg. Also, John received the lots at Blandford in Prince George, stock from Sandy Point, several horses (evidently favorites, as they were mentioned by name) and enough cattle from King's Creek to make 100 at Blandford plus £2,000 sterling.

Armistead received all lots and houses not already disposed of as well as the pasture and land in Goochland and 60 slaves, the town house in Yorktown after his mother's death and lands in New Kent and Hanover counties together with £2,000 sterling.

Grandson Francis (Philip's son) received two Negroes (Lucy and Jacob) and £300 to be his when he became 21. Philip's widow was to be paid £1,000 of any dower she might expect from lands designated to the sons. Elizabeth Burwell (a grandchild of his wife through her first marriage) was to receive £300 when she reached 21, or married, with her grandmother's approval.

Philip Lightfoot remembered not only his family in his will, but also his church and educational causes. He left £50 to the Parish of Yorkhampton

19. Provisions of the will are given in York County Records, Wills and Inventories, No. 20 (1746-1759), pp. 103-106.

for "purchase of a handsome Flaggon and Challace with my Arms Engraven thereon for the Use of York Church," and £40 to William Nelson and William Lightfoot to be distributed to the poor of the parish. The College of William and Mary received £200 for a foundation for two scholars, one of the first nominations to go to William Lightfoot. Several other minor items were taken care of in the will, and anything not otherwise disposed of was to be equally divided between the three sons.

Mary Lightfoot died in 1775, apparently occupying the large town house until then, and outliving all of her children. In her will she mentioned two of her daughters-in-law--Mildred (William's wife) and Anne (Armistead's wife), grandsons William and Philip Lightfoot and James Burwell (and his daughter Anne). There was reference, too, to granddaughters Mary Allen, Anne Lightfoot, Elizabeth Hewitt, and Mildred and Elizabeth Coles as well as to Lewis Burwell, William Allen, and Richard Hewitt. Reference was also made to the poor people of Yorktown.²⁰

Armistead's family inherited the town house in Yorktown. It became the residence of the Griffins, for Armistead's daughter Mary had married into that family. In 1777 the home was mentioned by Thomas Wyld, Junior, in The Virginia Gazette:

I take this method to inform the publick in general, and the gentlemen who have favoured me with their custom hitherto, that I have removed ... to the large brick house behind the court house, the property of Dr. John Griffin, and formerly belnging to Mrs. Lightfoot²¹

The Lightfoot house withstood the siege of 1781, for it was still referred to even in the next century. In 1814, after the fire, the ladies of the town, families whose property was destroyed, were cared for "under the spacious and hospitable roof of Major Griffin's house" At the time of Lafayette's visit in 1824 "Major Griffin's romantic house" served as headquarters for the invited guests.²²

It is possible that the house described in the fire insurance policy taken out in 1832 by Thomas Griffin covered the home of Colonel Lightfoot, for the house described stood between the courthouse and the river. If so,

20. "Lightfoot Family," William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, III (October, 1894), 105-108.

21. The Virginia Gazette, August 22, 1777, in Riley, History of ... Yorktown, p. 79.

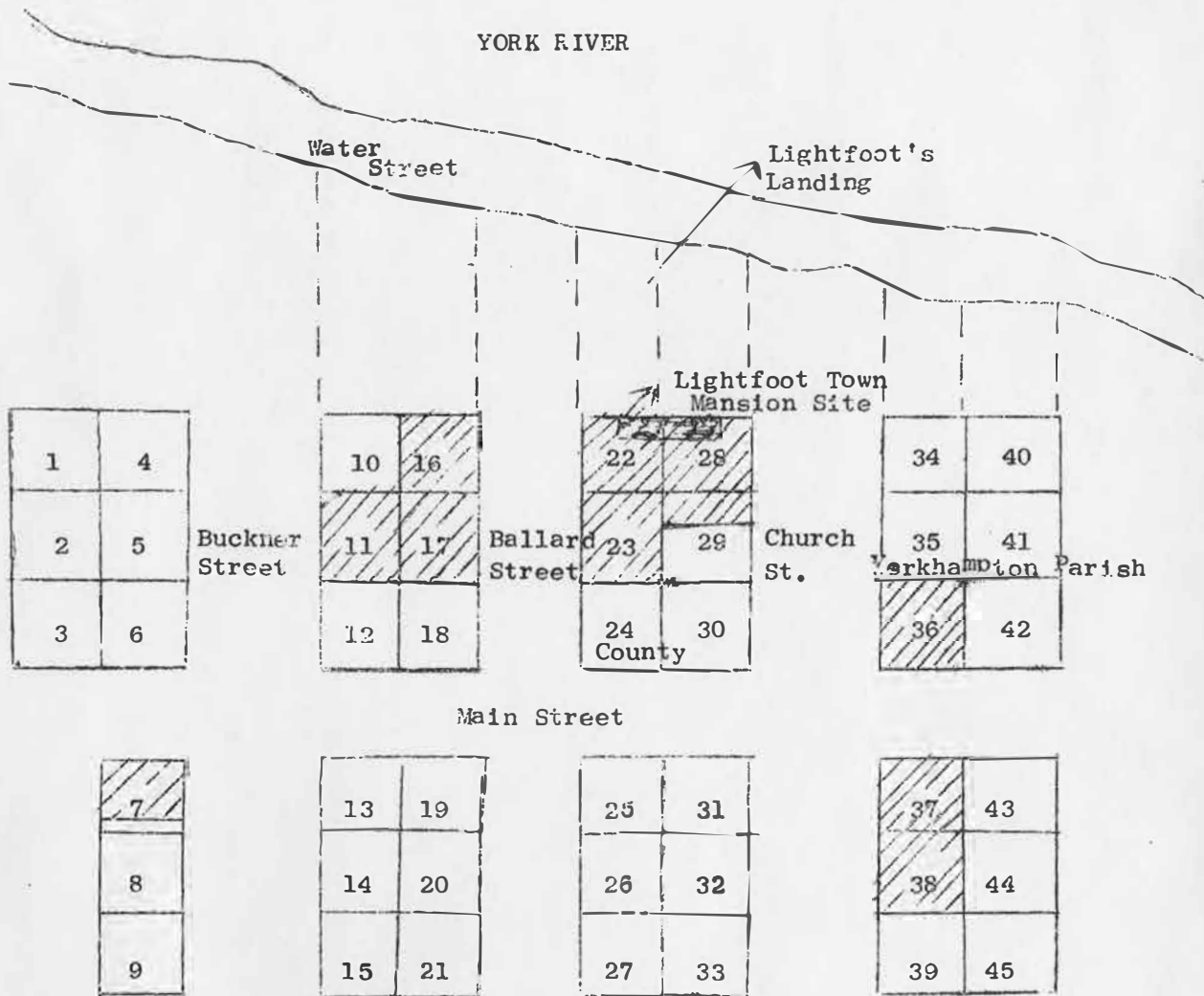
22. The Richmond Enquirer, March 9, 1814, and October 20, 1824, in Riley's, History of ... Yorktown, p. 79.

The description is partly faulty as regards height. It was described in the policy as a one-story, brick structure (70' x 40') with a wooden roof. Behind it stood a one-story brick "kitchen, office, & c." (70' x 20') with a wooden roof, a small brick dairy and wooden smokehouse.²³

The tenure of the Lightfoot influence in Yorktown lasted only from 1707, when Philip Lightfoot was appointed county clerk and moved to the town, to 1775 when his widow died, all four children having previously died. During this period the family established itself prominently in the life of Yorktown as civic and political leaders, as controllers of commerce, and surely in the social activities. Their town house occupied one of the most beautiful spots in town, on a high bluff overlooking the York River. Perhaps second only to the Nelsons, the Lightfoots were the most noted Yorktown family of the 18th century.

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23. From Policy No. 7940, Mutual Assurance Society, Richmond, Virginia, photostat in files of Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, Virginia.

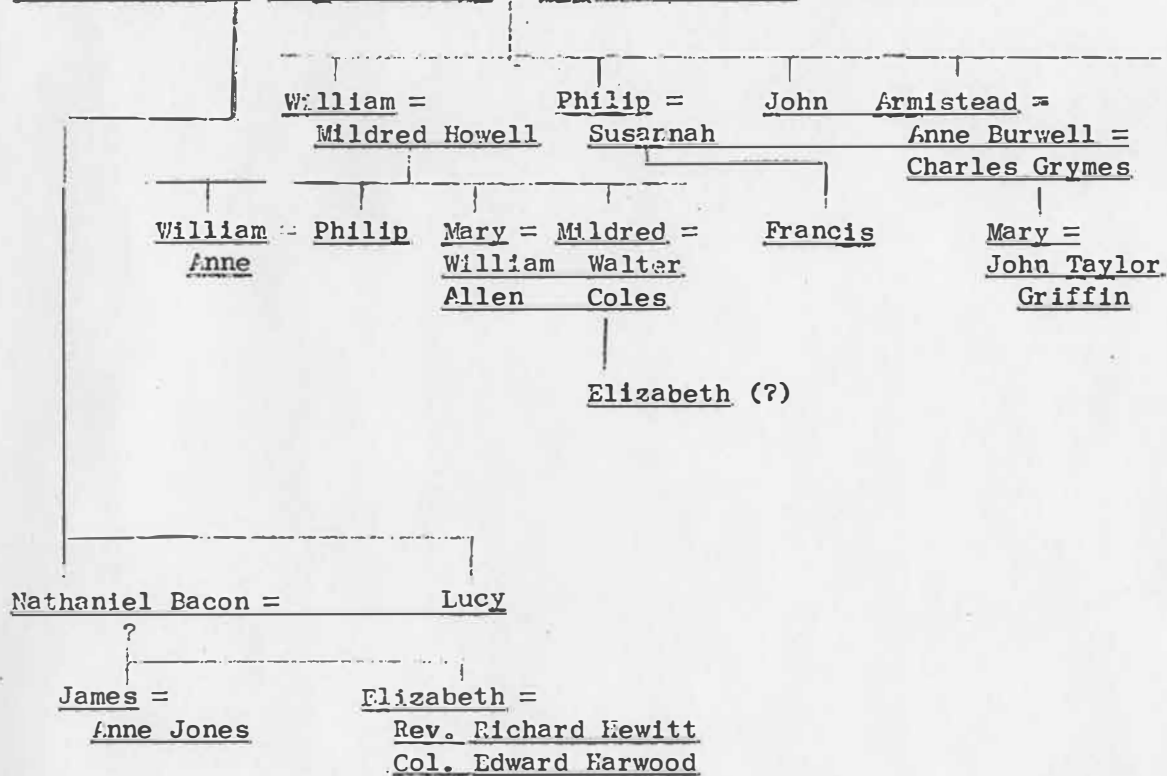


YORKTOWN LOTS OWNED BY PHILIP LIGHTFOOT IN 1739

Of 83 town lots in 1739, this sketch of 45 shows those owned by Lightfoot during that year (shaded lots).

YORKTOWN LIGHTFOOT GENEALOGY

James Burwell = Mary Armistead = PHILIP LIGHTFOOT (1689-1748)



Philip Lightfoot's tomb at "Sandy Point" (Charles City County) bears this inscription:

This Tomb is Sacred to the Memory
Of the Honourable Philip Lightfoot Esquire.
In various Employments of Public Trust
An Example
Of Loyalty to his King, of Affection to his Country
In the several Regards of Private Life
A Pattern
Worthy of Imitation
An Equanimity which few are (cap)able of
Conducted him with success
Through the less elevated Scenes of Life
And continued to be the Ornament
of the Most Exalted,
Not arrogant with Prosperity
He graced a superior Fortune.
Acquired by his own Industry, and honesty,
Not imperious with advancement
He rose to almost the highest honours of his Country
His Rank & Fortune made him more Extensively**
He was descended from an Ancient Family in England
Which came over to Virginia in a Genteel and Honble Character
On the 30th Day of May, 1748, in the 59th Year of his Age
His Spirit returned to God who gave it
And his Body reposes Here
In sure and certain Hopes of a joyful resurrection.¹

1. "Old Tombstones in Charles City County," William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st Series, IX (October, 1900), 122.

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